

NEWTON, MAIMONIDEAN

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I

The triumph of the anti-Maimonidean ideology in Spain, bent on eradicating “heresy” from Israel, had a ripple effect as of yet unexplored by Jewish historians and other luminaries. It is not accurate that the anti-Maimonideans were against “assimilation” to non-Jewish ideas, as the magistrates of Jewish wisdom kindly moralize. In fact, the anti-Maimonideans were willing to take a lesson or two from those Christians who condemned men of the stature of William of Conches (ca. 1090-ca. 1160), Peter Abelard (1079-1142), and Thomas Aquinas (1224/5-1274). These holy men would not shy away from learning from *any* persecuting ideology, regardless of religion or philosophical persuasion.¹ What they opposed were people like the Maimonideans who were spreading all types of silly, essentially harmful, ideas, like writing that sorcery and witchcraft are “lies and falsehood.” There is malice in these fabrications. They were designed to impugn the minds and judgment of those saintly men—the inerrantly pious—who not only witnessed demons but also kept daily contacts with them and other supernatural beings. In fact, all men of sound mind and spirit should reject the Maimonidean folly, especially in light of the unimpeachable evidence provided by “the science of necromancy.” As a good and wise doctor at the Sorbonne wrote in 1609 about those feeble souls denying night-flying witches, metamorphoses, etc., magical phenomena are so well attested to that they could be “disbelieved only by those of unsound mind.”²

The anti-Maimonidean society is, primarily and fundamentally, a persecuting society.³ It seems that Gresham’s law of economics,

¹ See José Faur, *In the Shadow of History: Jews and Conversos at the Dawn of Modernity* (Albany, 1992), pp. 9-27.

² See José Faur, “Anti-Maimonidean Demons,” in *The Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 6 (2003), pp. 3-52.

³ See Faur, *In the Shadow of History*, pp. 2, 6, 215-217. A telling detail, indicative

whereby bad money drives good money out of circulation, applies to political and social leadership as well.⁴ A society that accepts magic and the reveries of lunatics as God's True Word would not tolerate rational discourse—least of all the scientific study of nature or an intelligent consideration of Judaism. Thus, creative thinking, let alone scientific knowledge, was no longer tolerated. This explains the sad fact that most of the creative thinking in the sciences, humanities, and literature in Spain, was made by *conversos*. Yet nothing remotely similar was taking place within the confines of the Jewish communities.⁵ In this respect, after the Expulsion (1492) things got worse, not better. The few men who preserved some vestige of the old Jewish scientific tradition—I am thinking about such distinguished figures as Rabbis Moscs Almosnino (c. 1515-1589), David Gans (1541-1613), Joseph Del Medigo (1591-1655)—were working with medieval concepts, no longer on a par with the scientific outlook unfolding at their time. The few creative minds had to tread carefully. On the instigation of Sabbatean sympathizers, R. David Nieto (1654-1728), rabbi of the Sephardic community in London, was about to be excommunicated for a sermon he pronounced in his own synagogue.⁶ R. Israel Moses Hazan (1807-1863), who had been the Chief Rabbi of Rome, Corfu, and Alexandria, was ferociously persecuted by his semi-literate colleagues.⁷ R. Elie Benamozegh (1822-1900), Chief Rabbi of Leghorn, one of the most distinguished communities in Europe, was declared a heretic and his books banned, etc.⁸ We often forget that Jews were

of the supreme authority exercised by the anti-Maimonideans: throughout the communities around the Mediterranean Basin and the Middle East (with the exception of Yemen) is yet to be found a single scroll of the Torah written according to the format prescribed by Maimonides! This is true even in Aleppo, home of the famous codex of Maimonides' *Keter Aram Soba*. Cf. Faur, "Anti-Maimonidean Demons," nn. 23-24.

⁴ Cf. Faur, *In the Shadow of History*, pp. 21-22.

⁵ Ibid., p. 2.

⁶ On the content and significance of this sermon, see José Faur, *Golden Doves and Silver Dots: Semiotics and Textuality in Rabbinic Tradition* (Bloomington, 1986), pp. 19-22.

⁷ See José Faur, *Rabbi Yisrael Moshe Hazan* (Heb.) (Haifa, 1978), pp. 15-18.

⁸ The impact on his family and personal life was devastating. However, on behalf of the persecuting rabbis one may point out that this was not a case of simple malice. As always, the "heretical" view of the "other" is connected to pecuniary gain. In our case, R. Benamozegh owned one of the largest printing houses of Hebrew books in Leghorn. Declaring him "heretical" meant that the books he printed must be proscribed, regardless of content. Consequently, competing firms, which until now could not enter the market, gained the upper hand. A few years ago in Leghorn, on the one hundred year anniversary of Benamozegh's death, I pointed out that as a result, he no longer would append his full signature to the books he printed and his editorial notes, but only the initials **אמז**, standing for Eliahu ben Amozegh.

able to produce a Freud or an Einstein not as the result of some internal development but simply because universities decided to open their doors to Jews without demanding prior conversion. One can only ponder what the state of Jewish scholarship today would have been (including the fields of Talmud and Rabbinics), if it were not for the "Jewish Studies Programs" at universities world-wide.

It should not be surprising to discover, therefore, that some Jewish thinkers, particularly those professing the kind of religious humanism and pluralism developed by the Maimonidean tradition, chose to share their knowledge and exchange ideas with members of the Christian intelligentsia, many of them distinguished Hebraists in their own rights.⁹ One such individual was R. Isaac Abendana (c. 1640-c. 1710), brother of R. Jacob Abendana (1630-1685), Chief Rabbi of Amsterdam. He arrived in England in 1662. Abendana was an extremely talented and accomplished scholar. At the urging of Cambridge theologians he translated for the first time the entire Mishnah into Latin.¹⁰ His book, *Discourses on the Ecclesiastical and Civil Polity of the Jews* (London, 1706; 2nd edition 1709) is the first work written by a Jew in English. While at Cambridge he kept contact with the scholarly community at Oxford. Eventually, he moved to Oxford in 1689 and taught Hebrew at Magdalene College. In a work published in 1710 we are told, "Dr. Abendana assisted Dr. [Thomas] Hyde [1636-1703]. . . . The said Dr. [Abendana] was himself the author of the Hebrew tract (written in a florid style) concerning Chess, published as an old piece by Dr. Hyde."¹¹

Elsewhere I proposed that Abendana was Isaac Newton's (1643-1727) Hebrew teacher.¹² Abendana began teaching Hebrew at

⁹ See the important work of Aaron L. Katchen, *Christian Hebraists and Dutch Rabbis* (Cambridge, MA, 1984). On the impact of Maimonides on in particular, see *ibid.* chapter 3. On the impact of Maimonides on sixteenth and seventeenth century Englishmen, such as Hobbes, Milton, John Smith, John Spencer, et al., see the stimulating note of J.L. Teicher, "Maimonides and England," in *Transactions, Jewish Historical Society of England*, 16 (1950), pp. 97-100.

¹⁰ See Israel Abrahams, "Isaac Abendana's Cambridge Mishna and Oxford Calendars," in *Transactions, Jewish Historical Society of England* 8 (1915-1917), pp. 98-121; and *idem.*, "Note on Isaac Abendana," in *Transactions, Jewish Historical Society of England* 10 (1921-1923), pp. 221-224. For some valuable notes on Isaac and Jacob Abendana, see M. Kayserling, "Les Correspondants Juifs de Jean Buxtorf," in *Revue des Études Juives* 13 (1886), pp. 272-276.

¹¹ Cited by William D. Macray, "A letter from Isaac Abendana," in *Festschrift zum achtzigsten Geburtstag von Moritz Steinschneider* (Leipzig, 1896), p. 89.

¹² José Faur, "Newton, Maimonides, and Esoteric Knowledge," in *Cross Currents: Religion & Intellectual Life* 8 (1990), p. 528.

Cambridge in 1663, a year after Newton entered Trinity College. Newton was an excellent Hebraist. Although only a small portion of Newton's library was saved (see below section III), several Hebrew Bibles, Buxtorf, *Lexicon Hebraicum* (1621), Robertson, *Lexicon Hebraeum* (1680), as well as many works on Jewish subjects were found in the remains of his library.¹³ Newton's knowledge of Rabbinics was simply amazing. In the course of a Rabbinic discussion, Newton records the opinion of R. Aharon ha-Levi (thirteenth century), the supposed author of *Sefer ha-Hinnukh*,¹⁴ and his disagreement with Rashi on the matter at hand. He also refers to the Rabbinic work Sifra as well as to the view of R. Aaron ibn Hayyim (b. ca. 1560), author of *Qorban Aharon* (Venice, 5369/1609).¹⁵ Later on, he examined *Seder Ma'amadot* (the participation of the Israelites in the daily sacrifices) and quoted the opinion of R. 'Obadiah of Bertinoro on M. Yoma 7:1.¹⁶ In a discussion of the apocalyptic conflict of Gog and Magog, he made reference to the Targum to Esther (2: 12), to the Rabbinic work Leviticus Rabbah, and to the commentaries of Se'adya Ga'on and Ibn 'Ezra.¹⁷ In his *Chronology of Ancient Kingdoms* (London, 1727), Newton cites Yerushalmi Shebi'it (p. 198) and Seder 'Olam (p. 357).¹⁸ In his work *The Sacred Cubit of the Jews*, published in the *Collected Works* of John Greaves (London, 1738), he alludes to the commentary of R. 'Obadiah of Bertinoro on M. Erubin 4:5 (s.v. *ella*) (p. 421); he translates the Aramaic version of Ruth 1:6 in conjunction with the distance a Jew is permitted to travel by foot on the Sabbath and holidays (pp. 422-423); cites a passage in the Talmud (B. Erubin 42a) and the note on it in *Shibbole ha-Leqet* (by R. Sidiqiyya ha-Rofe, Venice 5306/1546, #97) (p. 423); and also makes reference to the two cubits that were engraved in the city of Susan B. Pesahim 86a) (p. 425). There are some Hebrew writings in Newton's own hand¹⁹

¹³ See Richard de Villamil, *Newton: The Man* (London, 1927), p. 67, and *ibid.*, "Supplementary List," p. 105.

¹⁴ There is a book by Johann Heinrich Hottinger, *Juris Hebraeorum* (Zurich, 1655), based on this work.

¹⁵ See Yah. Ms. 13.2, 21b-22a.

¹⁶ Yah. Ms. 13.2, 22b.

¹⁷ See H. McLachlan, *Sir Isaac Newton: Theological Manuscripts* (Liverpool, 1950), p. 135.

¹⁸ There is a Latin translation of this work by Gilbert Gènebrard, *Chronologia Hebraeorum Maior* (Paris, 1578).

¹⁹ See Ms. Yahuda (at the Hebrew National Library, Jerusalem) 13.2, pp. 5b, 17a-b, 18a, 19a, 22b; Ms. Keynes 2, p. 17a.

as well as extensive passages from the Babylonian Talmud and Yerushalmi in Latin in his own hand.²⁰ With the exception of Nieto and Abendana, no other scholar in England at the time, Jew or Christian, equaled his mastery of Jewish knowledge.

A copy of Abendana's first edition of *Discourses on the Ecclesiastical and Civil Polity of the Jews* (1706) was found in Newton's library.²¹ Indeed, many of the subjects subsequently developed by Newton are found in Abendana's book. From his teacher, Newton must have gotten his keen interest in the Jewish calendar.²² I would like to call attention to Yah. Ms. 22, a work by Newton on the Calendar, "Considerations about rectifying the Julian Kalender." On p. 4 of the ms. is a quotation from Maimonides' *Qiddush ha-Hodesh* in the Jewish calendar, taken from Ludovicus de Compiegne de Veille, *Secunda Lex, Tractatus de Conservazione Calendarum* (Paris, 1669)—a favorite topic of Abendana.²³ Again, in line with Abendana's interest in Jewish measurements,²⁴ there is a detailed investigation by Newton of the Jewish cubit. A short tract by Newton, *The Sacred Cubit of the Jews*, was published in the *Collected Works* of John Greaves (London, 1738), pp. 405-433. From Abendana, too, he must have gotten his keen interest in Maimonides. In addition to four books of Maimonides' Legal Code in Latin,²⁵ as well as Pococke, *Porta Mosis* (1655) in Hebrew and Latin found in his library,²⁶ there are thousands of words copied by Newton from Maimonides' legal writings in Latin.²⁷

²⁰ See *A Catalogue of the Portsmouth Collection of Books and Papers Written by or Belonging to Sir Isaac Newton*, prepared by H.R. Leard, G.G. Stokes, G.C. Adams, G.D. Living (Cambridge, 1888), p. 29 #2; Yah. Ms. Var. 13.2, 18a-22b. On the Latin translations of the Talmud, see Erich Bischoff, *Kritische Geschichte der Talmud-Übersetzungen* (Frankfurt, 1899).

²¹ See de Villamil, *Newton: The Man*, p. 63.

²² See *ibid.*, p. 81 (*Jewish Calendar*); 87 (Münster, *Kalendarium Hebraicum*); 94 (*Rule for Finding Easter*, &c.). In *Chronology of Ancient Kingdoms* (London, 1727), p. 77, he referred to the intercalation of the year of the Jewish calendar, as well as the years of the kings among Jews, *ibid.*, p. 296. By contrast, *ibid.* p. 298, he made reference "to the vulgar Aera of Christ." On Abendana's Jewish calendars, see "Isaac Abendana's Cambridge Mishna and Oxford's Calendars," pp. 117-121.

²³ See Isaac Abendana, *Discourses on the Ecclesiastical and Civil Polity of the Jews* [hitherto: *Discourses*] (London, 1706), pp. 171-198; and "Isaac Abendana's Cambridge Mishna and Oxford Calendars," pp. 104-107.

²⁴ See *Discourses*, pp. 198-200.

²⁵ See *A Catalogue of the Portsmouth Collection*, p. 85.

²⁶ *A Catalogue of the Portsmouth Collection*, p. 91.

²⁷ See, for example, *A Catalogue of the Portsmouth Collection*, p. 29 #2, and p. 30 #16; Yah. Ms. 13.2, 1a-18a. Cf. McLachlan, *Sir Isaac Newton: Theological Manuscripts*, p. 16. He seems to have used the translation of Ludovicus de Compiegne Veille,

Abendana completed a Latin translation of Maimonides' work on *The Vessels of the Temple*.²⁸ There are long excerpts of the Latin translation of Maimonides' *De Cultu Divino* in Newton's own handwriting.²⁹

II

Newton's religious views affected his scientific writings.³⁰ David Castillejo (who catalogued the Newton manuscripts in the Yahuda collection at the Hebrew University) noted the remarkable fact that Newton used certain numerological symbolism, particularly the numbers three, seven, and ten taken from the Temple of Solomon to structure his *Opticks*. According to Newton, the Temple was built horizontally in units of ten, and vertically in units of three, seven, and eight. His *Opticks* consists of seven books arranged into three parts. It opens with eight Definitions, eight Axioms, and eight Propositions, a triple row of eights. "It is likely," wrote Castillejo, "that this is only the tip of an iceberg revealing the presence of much more complicated meaning, proportion, and intent in his work."³¹

Newton's interest in Rabbinics and Maimonides was not mere intellectual curiosity. It affected his most intimate religious beliefs and his Christianity. "[T]here was something sinister in his religious beliefs," we are told.³² Bishop Horsley (1773-1806), who examined some of Newton's papers on theology, declared them unfit for printing. Sir David Brewster (1781-1868), Newton's famous biographer, believed that bishop Horsley "exercised a wise discretion" in not allowing their publication. In the name of Christian charity, Brewster refused to formally declare Newton a "heretic." Piously, he explained:

De Cultu Divino (Paris?), cf. Newton, "The Language of the Prophets," in Keynes Ms. 5, chapter 2, pp. 9-10; On the translations of Maimonides' *Mishne Torah* to Latin, see *Christian Hebraists and Dutch Rabbis*.

²⁸ See W.D. Macray, "A letter from Isaac Abendana," p. 90; and Israel Abrahams, "Note on Isaac Abendana," in *Transactions, Jewish Historical Society of England* 10 (1921-1923), pp. 221-224.

²⁹ See above, n. 27.

³⁰ I hope to develop this theme in a forthcoming study.

³¹ David Castillejo, "A Report on the Yahuda Collection of Newton's MSS," found in the file on Newton at the Jewish National and University Library at Jerusalem, p. 8.

³² Louis Trenchard More, *Isaac Newton: A Biography* (New York, 1962), p. 631.

It may be an ecclesiastical privilege to burrow for heresy among the obscurities of thought, and the ambiguities of language, but in the charity which thinketh no evil, we are bound to believe that our neighbor is not a heretic till the charge against him has been distinctly proved.³³

A cursory examination of some of his theological views published thus far makes it abundantly clear the reason for the horror that they caused. The papers reveal that Newton was a strict monotheist. He saw no need for a new revelation and rebuffed the Christian notion of atonement and salvation. Siding with Rabbinic tradition and *contra* Christian doctrine, he maintained that the Noahide precepts alone suffice for salvation, and thus there is no need for Jesus' expiatory death.³⁴ In opposition to Christian doctrine, he proposed that the Church derives from the Synagogue—not the Temple—"the name of synagogues being changed to that of churches" by converted gentiles.³⁵ Therefore, not only does he refer to the Jewish "Church" but also to the Christian "Synagogue."³⁶ This is consistent with Newton's view that the fundamentals of Judaism and Christianity are the same: "love of God and love of humankind."³⁷ More grievously, Newton was resolute in his belief that the Law of Moses was not abrogated with the advent of Christianity. Referring to the Gospels, he writes: "It is as much the law of God as the Law of Moses was, and as unalterable."³⁸ Therefore, the Christian Scripture must be understood in light of the Hebrew Scripture, and not the other way around:

[I]f any question at any time arises concerning his [Jesus'] interpretations, we are to have recourse to the Old Testament and compare the places interpreted with the interpretations of the New. As, for instance, in explaining why Jesus is called the Christ or Messiah, the Son of Man, the Son of God, the Lamb of God and the Lord who sitteth on the right hand of God, the God who was made in the beginning with God and by whom all things were made. And by this means

³³ Sir David Brewster, *Memoirs of the Life, Writings, and Discoveries of Sir Isaac Newton*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1855), vol. 2, p. 340.

³⁴ See Richard S. Westfall, *Science and Religion in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven, 1958), p. 208.

³⁵ See McLachlan, *Sir Isaac Newton: Theological Manuscripts*, pp. 39-40, cf. pp. 16-17. Cf. José Faur, "Law and Hermeneutics in Rabbinic Jurisprudence: A Maimonidean Perspective," in *Cardozo Law Review* 14 (1993), pp. 1673-1764.

³⁶ Cf. McLachlan, *Sir Isaac Newton: Theological Manuscripts*, pp. 38, 41, etc.

³⁷ See *ibid.*, p. 28.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

the Old Testament will be better understood. So then for the names of Christ we are to have recourse to the Old Testament, and beware of vain Philosophy, for Christ sent his Apostles not to teach Philosophy to the common people and to their wives and children, but to teach what he had taught, taken out of Moses and the Prophets and Psalms concerning Christ.³⁹

In full accord with Maimonides,⁴⁰ and *contra* the Church, Newton regarded the worship of intercessors as rank idolatry. In a passage discussing the worship of God, Newton writes:

These things we must do, not to any mediator between him and us, but to him alone, "that he may give his angels charge over us," who, being our fellow-servants, are pleased with the worship which we give to their God. And this is the first and principal part of religion. This always was and always will be the religion of all God's people from the beginning to the end of the world.⁴¹

Concerning prayers, he wrote: "We need not pray to Christ to intercede for us," adding: "If we pray the Father aright, he will intercede."⁴² Worshiping God means, "To love, fear and trust in, and seek unto one but himself immediately."⁴³ The last term "immediately" is of the essence and underlines the prohibition against saints, deities, etc., functioning as intercessors with God. Newton noticed that in the Hebrew Scripture, God's name is also applied to his angels and messengers.⁴⁴ This means that God may be semiotically associated with his creatures. There is, however, a huge distinction between semiotics and worship: although God's name may be connected with one of his creatures, no one may be worshiped except him: one ought to return "thanks to the Father alone . . . we ask of him immediately

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 33-34.

⁴⁰ Moses Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed* (henceforth: *Guide*), I, 61, p. 100 (ll. 20-29). All quotations proceed from the Arabic text, *Dalalat al-Ha'irin*, edited with variant readings by Issachar Joel (Jerusalem, 5691 [1930/31]); the translations are mine. Subsequent references are given in the text according to section, chapter, page and line. *Guide*, I, 36, p. 56 (ll. 19-27); *Mishne Torah*, *Aboda Zara*, 1:1; *Perush ha-Mishnayot*, *Sanhedrin*, X, 1, Foundation V, ed. R. Joseph Qalish (Jerusalem, 1964), vol. 4, p. 212. Cf. *Mishne Torah*, *Teshuva* 3:7.

⁴¹ McLachlan, *Sir Isaac Newton: Theological Manuscripts*, p. 51.

⁴² Ibid., p. 57.

⁴³ Yah. Ms. 15, pp. 1-2.

⁴⁴ See Exod. 23:21 and *Guide* I, 27, p. 39 (ll. 16-28); I, 64; II, 6; and the explanation given by R. Manasseh ben Israel, *The Conciliator*, trans. by R.E.H. Lindo, 2 vols. (London, 1842), vol. 1, pp. 70, 260-261; vol. 2, pp. 12-18. Cf. R. David Qamhi, on Josh. 3:11 and Is. 42:8.

in the *name* [italics added] of Christ."⁴⁵ He incorporated this doctrine as an article of faith:

Art. 11. To Give the name of God to angels or kings is not against the First Commandment. To give the worship of the God of the Jews to angels or kings, is against it. The meaning of the commandment is, Thou shalt worship no other God but me.⁴⁶

Newton repudiated Jesus' divinity⁴⁷ and regarded Jesus as "a true man born of a woman,"⁴⁸ only "the Word or prophet of God."⁴⁹ "The time will come," he told Hopton Haynes (1672-1749), "when the doctrine of the Incarnation, as commonly received, shall be exploded as an absurdity equal to transubstantiation."⁵⁰ In this connection it would be helpful to consider Newton's explanation of the enigmatic "deity of the *ma'uzzim*" in Dan. 11:38-39. Jewish commentators associate these verses with the rise and spread of Christianity. R. Isaac Abarbanel (1437-1508), interprets *ma'uzzim* as "fortresses." These are the Christian Cathedrals that look as if they were fortresses; the "divinity" within these fortresses is the cult of Jesus.⁵¹ Newton identified *ma'uzzim* as mausoleums, harboring "the souls of the dead." To make sure that no one would miss the point, he continued:

All which relates to the overspreading of the Greek Empire with Monks and Nuns, who placed holiness in abstinence from marriage; and to the invocation of saints and veneration of their reliques, and such like superstitions, which these men introduced in the fourth and fifth centuries.⁵²

Consistent with the preceding, Newton rejected the Christian interpretation that "the elder of days" (Dan. 7:9, 13) refers to Jesus.⁵³

⁴⁵ McLachlan, *Sir Isaac Newton: Theological Manuscripts*, p. 57.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ See Westfall, *Science and Religion in Seventeenth-Century England*, pp. 210-211; More, *Isaac Newton: A Biography*, pp. 640-644.

⁴⁸ McLachlan, *Sir Isaac Newton: Theological Manuscripts*, p. 54, cf. *ibid.* pp. 55-56.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 56.

⁵⁰ Cited in H. McLachlan, *The Religious Opinions of Milton, Locke, and Newton* (New York, 1972), p. 127.

⁵¹ R. Isaac Abarbanel, *Ma'yan ha-Yeshu'a* (Venice, 5407/1647), XI, 8, 75d. A Latin translation of this work was made by Johannes Henricus Maius, *De haustu aquarum a fontibus salutis* (Frankfurt, 1710).

⁵² See Isaac Newton, *Observations upon the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John* (London, 1733), p. 191.

⁵³ For a summary of the Christian interpretation of this passage and the ensuing Jewish criticism, see Abarbanel, *Ma'yan ha-Yeshu'a* VIII, 6, 44a-45c.

"[W]hence are you certain that the Ancient of Days is Christ?"—he asked Locke (1632-1704). In full accord with Jewish exegesis that it refers to God,⁵⁴ Newton asked Locke: "Does Christ any where sit upon the throne?"⁵⁵ More grievously, Newton rejected belief in the Holy Trinity and submitted that the passages in the New Testament to this effect are interpolations made by the ecclesiastical authorities.⁵⁶ It is clear now why such a deeply religious man as Newton did not attend Church.⁵⁷

III

To discredit Newton's religious beliefs it was alleged that by 1692 he had gone mad,⁵⁸ although his correspondence with Locke and Bentley at the time show him to be perfectly sane. "[I]t is a gross exaggeration to refer to this as 'Newton madness'"—remarked Professor Andrade (1887-1971).⁵⁹ The allegation was intended to conceal Newton's "dreadful secret." Lord John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946), who examined these papers, replied:

⁵⁴ On this point, see the incisive remark by the editor, R. Abraham Joseph Wertheimer, R. Isaiah di Trani the First, *Commentary on Prophets and Hagiographa* (Heb.) vol. 3, (Jerusalem, 1978), p. 216, n. 85.

⁵⁵ More, *Isaac Newton: A Biography*, p. 360; see *ibid.*, p. 361. Predictably, More, *ibid.*, p. 626, tried to explain this away by claiming that at the "time, Newton was skeptical of Daniel's prophecy as predicting the coming of Christ." And yet at the bottom of the page, More quotes a passage of Newton stating that "to reject his [Daniel's] prophecies is to reject the Christian religion." See McLachlan, *Sir Isaac Newton: Theological Manuscripts*, p. 18.

⁵⁶ See *Historical Account of Two Notable Corruptions of Scripture*. For a brief discussion of this work, see *Memoirs of the Life, Writings, and Discoveries of Sir Isaac Newton*, vol. 2, pp. 331-337; More, *Sir Isaac Newton: A Biography*, pp. 632-635.

⁵⁷ See Gale E. Christianson, *In the Presence of the Creator* (New York, 1984), pp. 257-258.

⁵⁸ See McLachlan, *The Religious Opinions of Milton, Locke and Newton*, pp. 162-163. His interest in alchemy is often mentioned as evidence of his alleged madness. We forget that in his time "alchemy" was the equivalent of our "chemistry" and could have a much more scientific connotation than what the term suggests to the modern ear. For a sketchy description of Newton's interest in alchemy, see Edward Neville da Costa Andrade, *Sir Isaac Newton* (Garden City, 1958), pp. 129-132. To the present, there is no serious study of Newton's writings on alchemy. This is the place to point out that on the basis of the chemical and optical data at his disposal, Newton had as much a grasp of atomic theory as could have been possible at the time; see S.I. Vavilov, "Newton and the Atomic Theory," in *The Royal Society Tercentenary Celebrations*, pp. 43-55.

⁵⁹ Edward Neville da Costa Andrade, "Newton," in *The Royal Society Newton Tercentary Celebrations* (Cambridge, 1947), p. 16.

Let me not exaggerate through reaction against the other Newton myth which has been so sedulously created for the last two hundred years. There was extreme method in his madness. All his unpublished works on esoteric and theological matters are marked by careful learning, accurate method and extreme sobriety of statement. They are just as *sane* as the *Principia*, if their whole matter and purpose were not magical. They were nearly all composed during the same twenty-five years of his mathematical studies.⁶⁰

To conceal any connection between Newton and Judaism, pious scholars fabricated all kinds of silly theories: from his alleged "madness" to having fallen under the influence of Jacob Boehme (1575-1624).⁶¹ Inventive biographers (moved by ethical virtue, they are the best) piously masked Newton's beliefs by relating them to this or that "heretical" view held by some vague *Christian* denomination. Louis Trenchard More (1870-1944), Newton's best biographer to date, proposed that Newton was a Unitarian or perhaps an Arian;⁶² he could also be described as "essentially a Protestant"⁶³—although he negated the Holy Trinity,⁶⁴ or that his beliefs are those of "extreme Protestants," with the qualification, however, that they exhibit "tenderness towards the Arians."⁶⁵ I think that More had in fact clinched our argument!

The only writer who had the fortitude to reveal Newton's "dreadful secret" was Lord John Maynard Keynes—one of those luminous minds with which God graces humanity once in a long, long time. The Director of the Bank of England and father of "Keynesian Economics," he was the most influential English economist of his time. People familiar with the particulars of his life know that he was a man of extraordinary courage, unyielding to public opinion or to pressure, either personal or social. Keynes had read more of Newton's papers than anyone else, and was eminently qualified to

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁶¹ See McLachlan, *Sir Isaac Newton: Theological Manuscripts*, pp. 20-21. None of Boehme's works were in his library. More to the point, investigation in this area had shown this to be false. At best, his interest in Boehme may have been peripheral and related to his alchemists' notions alone; see Stephen Hobhouse, *William Law: Selected Mystical Writings* (London, 1938), vol. 4, pp. 346-347.

⁶² See More, *Isaac Newton: A Biography*, pp. 630-631.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 611.

⁶⁴ See *ibid.*, pp. 636-637, and Christianson, *In the Presence of the Creator*, pp. 250-255.

⁶⁵ More, *Isaac Newton: A Biography*, p. 637. See McLachlan, *Sir Isaac Newton: Theological Manuscripts*, pp. 23-25. Newton had no sympathy for Arian doctrines. This is why he did not say a word on behalf of the Arian beliefs of his friend William Whiston; see Christianson, *In the Presence of the Creator*, p. 255.

speaking with authority on this matter. He was an avid collector of books, and in close contact with the renowned Jewish book dealer Gustav David who advised him on Jewish material. Although he was not a specialist in Jewish philosophy, Keynes himself was a gifted philosopher and the author of a brilliant book on logic, *A Treatise on Probability* (London, 1921). A Philo-Semite, he was not only personally active in helping individual Jews (the economist Piero Sraffa comes to mind), but he put great efforts in trying to alleviate the lot of Jewish refugees in general. He was also a Zionist, the only non-Jewish member of the advisory committee under the chairmanship of Herbert Samuel, which prepared the preliminary draft for a Jewish national home in Palestine.⁶⁶

Although he did not cite the specific documentation, Keynes' testimony is unimpeachable. Precisely because Keynes was not a specialist in Jewish topics, he would not have risked his reputation by associating Newton with Maimonides, unless he had found solid evidence supporting this view:

Very early in life Newton abandoned orthodox belief in Trinity. . . . It may be that Newton fell under Socinian influences, but I think not. He was rather a *Judaic monotheist of the school of Maimonides* [italics added]. He arrived at this conclusion, not on so-to-speak rational or skeptical grounds, but entirely on the interpretation of ancient authority. He was persuaded that the revealed documents give no support to the Trinitarian doctrines which were due to late falsification. The revealed God was one God.⁶⁷

And indeed a Maimonidean he was.⁶⁸ His argument for the rejection of the Christian doctrine of *homoousion* ("co-substantiation" of God

⁶⁶ A fact not noted by his biographers Harrod, Skidelsky, and Hession. Keynes' role acquires particular significance when we bear in mind that "the fiercest opponent of the Zionist" in the British cabinet was none other than the secretary of state for India Edwin Montagu, his close friend and benefactor: see Anand Chandavarkar, "Was Keynes Anti-Semitic?" in *Economic and Political Weekly*, May 6, 2000, p. 1622. I thank my friend Dr. Ranjit Chatterjee for bringing this article to my attention.

⁶⁷ de Villamil, *Newton: The Man*, p. 30.

⁶⁸ See McLachlan, *Sir Isaac Newton: Theological Manuscripts*, pp. 16-17, where Newton's interest in Maimonides is acknowledged. McLachlan failed to appreciate the deep intellectual connection between them, on two grounds. First, he did not have first-hand knowledge of the subject and relied on the standard views of nineteenth century Jewish scholarship, which were trite and shallow at best. Second, he noticed that Newton wanted to keep philosophy and religion apart (cf. *ibid.*, p. 58), whereas Maimonides embraced both. However, at the time of Newton, "philosophy" meant

and Jesus) and thereby the Holy Trinity (leading him to believe that the New Testament had been corrupted intentionally by the scheming powers of the Church) comes from Maimonides. "Homooousion," argued Newton, "is unintelligible. 'Twas not understood in the Council of Nice, nor ever since. What cannot be understood is no object of belief."⁶⁹ The argument comes from Maimonides, who postulated that what cannot be intellectually conceptualized cannot be the object of faith. Maimonides illustrates the impossibility of such a belief by pointing to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.⁷⁰ Newton's statement concerning miracles and the impossibility of changing the laws of nature is identical to that of Maimonides.⁷¹ It is plain, therefore, why Newton could not accept the articles of faith of the Church of England and refused the Holy Order. For the same reason, he could not be Master of Trinity College and had to obtain a special dispensation to hold his Fellowship and the Lucasian Chair. The few historians who grasped Newton's ideas were determined to keep his "dreadful secret." Quoting Keynes, again:

Newton's proverbial fear of controversy, his suspicious attitude and neurotic behavior, his obsession with secrecy, and his eventual departure from Cambridge to an administrative position in London—all this, become perfectly clear in light of the dreadful secret he had to hide all his life. But this was a dreadful secret which Newton was at desperate pains to conceal all his life. It was the reason why he refused Holy Orders, and therefore had to obtain a special dispensation to hold his Fellowship and Lucasian Chair and could not be Master of Trinity. Even the Toleration Act of 1689 excepted anti-Trinitarians. Some rumours there were, but not at the dangerous dates when he was a young Fellow of Trinity. In the main the secret died with him. But it was revealed in many writings in his big box.⁷²

also "science." What Newton was saying is that one should not expect to find in Scripture "philosophical," that is, scientific, descriptions; see José Faur, "Esoteric Knowledge and the Vulgar," in *Trumah* 12 (2002), pp. 187-189.

⁶⁹ McLachlan, *The Religious Opinion of Milton, Locke and Newton*, p. 160.

⁷⁰ *Guide* I, 50.

⁷¹ More, *Isaac Newton: A Biography*, p. 623, and *Shemona Peraqim*, chapter 8 (= *Porta Mosai*, p. 240); cf. *Guide* II, 29; III, 24.

⁷² de Villamil, *Newton: The Man*, pp. 30-31.

IV

The foregoing leads us into what in fact is the *only* riddle surrounding Newton's life: the outrage perpetrated against his books and manuscripts by England, a country known for her profound reverence for the book and the written word. The irony of the matter is that while England was sponsoring the removal of the written records of the most recondite cultures of the globe, to be deposited and safeguarded in her libraries and museums, and at the same time that English travelers and savants were encouraged to collect books and manuscripts from all over the world for the motherland, England did not blink an eye while the books and manuscripts of her greatest genius were trashed away. The existence of Newton's library was well known.⁷³ Yet no efforts were made to save or catalogue it. It almost disappeared completely after his death. The books "were sold in bundles (one bundle being, in fact, composed of two hundred volumes!), as if of no special interest or value, and were sold, in consequence, at rubbish prices." Many of his books were "sent to the pulp mill."⁷⁴ His manuscripts were auctioned by order of Viscount Lymington, in July, 1936. They were divided into 330 lots and were sold by auction to thirty-three buyers, mostly dealers. Thus, under the passive (but always vigilant) eye of England, the thoughts of Newton were scattered throughout the four corners of the globe. "The papers were auctioned piecemeal," bewailed a scholar. "It must be regretted that any of them were allowed to leave England."⁷⁵ Part of the collection was acquired by Lord Keynes and is now at Kings College, England. Another portion was purchased by Professor Abraham Shalom Yahuda (1877-1951) and is now at the National Library in Jerusalem. The rest was scattered all over.⁷⁶ England's silence at this outrage is eloquent indeed. Why?

I submit that the failure to preserve Newton's library and manuscripts was the effect of religious bias. Newton himself was aware of the religious prejudices of his contemporaries and opposed the publication of his manuscripts.⁷⁷ Efforts were made to prevent the general public

⁷³ See *ibid.*, p. 4.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁷⁵ McLachlan, *The Religious Opinions of Milton, Locke, and Newton*, p. 172.

⁷⁶ On the major collections of Newton MSS, see I. Bernard Cohen, "Newton, Isaac," in *ACLS Dictionary of Scientific Biography* (New York, 1974), p. 94.

⁷⁷ See McLachlan, *Sir Isaac Newton: Theological Manuscripts*, p. 2.

from examining his writings. The volume of those writings was huge. There are over 1,300,000 words on religious matters in the Portsmouth collection alone.⁷⁸ None of the material had been published or indexed. The few who examined the papers were shocked. To protect Newton's "good name," the importance of the manuscripts was denied. "The Historical and Theological MSS," ascertained the scholars in charge of cataloguing the Portsmouth Collection, "cannot be considered of any great value."⁷⁹

Those who would say that England has no sense of fair play should not judge harshly. England, it seems, is no less frail than the rest of us, plain folk, who find it easier to preach than to teach. Being religiously superior is a serious responsibility, not always easy to discharge. We all like to think of ourselves as open minded, but there is a limit. Those familiar with the recondite paths crisscrossing the English ethos know that English etiquette freely excuses acknowledging favors received, but is unforgiving of naughty behavior. It is inexcusable and boorish not to shell tit-for-tat. Granted, golden boys have privileges, and England's favorite son was entitled to special treatment. True, to a point. But how in the name of good sense and good manners can one explain that a genius, of Newton's rank no less, would prefer? That is inexcusable! As noted by a modern student of Newton, no less than a professor of *History* at a distinguished university:

His [Newton's] future relationship with God was to be an intellectual rather than an emotional one, in which Christ, the loving and forgiving Redeemer, played a secondary role. It was . . . the omnipotent Creator, harsh Taskmaster, and imperious Judge of the Old Testament, who commanded Newton's lifelong attention and obedience.⁸⁰

What pearls of wisdom! One can only wonder why such a staggering thought never crossed Newton's wits! The indignation of a superior mind is not surprising. This august scholar could not ignore the fact that Newton had exchanged a religion of "tolerance" for "the jealous Creator of the Old Testament"! Let us hear the full statement. Disposing of the God of Israel simply as Y . . . h (a theological euphemism that nobody is expected to take seriously, and my Jewish upbringing

⁷⁸ See Andrade, "Newton," p. 21.

⁷⁹ *A Catalogue of the Portsmouth Collection*, p. xix.

⁸⁰ Christianson, *In the Presence of the Creator*, p. 248. For other derogatory remarks, see *ibid.*, pp. 252, 255, etc. Cf. *Reflections on Men and Ideas*, pp. 26, 179.

disallows me from spelling) he offered the kind of intellectual probity that only an accomplished historian can pronounce:

Y...h, as the Hebrews so painfully learned, was anything but a God of patient tolerance. Above all else, He had commanded the children of Israel, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." Nor, despite the moderating influence of a loving Christ's compassionate entry into history, did the record show that the jealous Creator of the Old Testament had experienced a profound change of heart.⁸¹

There is not a grain of cynicism, let alone hypocrisy. These words capture perfectly the mood and intellectual honesty the academic world cherishes so much! Any one minimally acquainted with history, particularly with the treatment of *conversos*, Native Americans, et al., will surely agree with the above "patient tolerance" and "loving Christ's compassionate entry into *history*" [italic added] exhibited by those untouched by the "jealous Creator of the Old Testament."⁸²

V

The Hebrew Tetragrammaton, what the sages of Israel refer to as *shem ha-meforash*, stands for God *ad intra* as He is to Himself.⁸³ Since Judaism postulates Creation *ex nihilo*, any and all ontological relationships between God and whichever of his creations, must be negated, totally and categorically. Thus, essentially and fundamentally, God's existence and the existence of everything else are absolutely dissimilar.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Christianson, *In the Presence of the Creator*, p. 252.

⁸² For some insights into the savagery and genocide performed by these good hearted folks, from the perspective of the victims rather than the aggressor, see José Faur, "Jews, *Conversos*, and Native Americans: The Iberian Experience," in *Annual of Rabbinic Judaism* 3 (2000), pp. 95-121.

⁸³ B. Sot. 38a. For some clarifications on this designation, see Louis Ginzberg's note in Israel Efros, *Philosophical Terms in the Moreh Nebukhm* (New York, 1924), pp. 143-144. Since already in biblical times the Tetragrammaton was regarded as too holy to pronounce, after the first Exile it was replaced by *Adonai*. This can be gathered by comparing parallel passages in *Chronicles* and early Scripture. During the Second Temple period it was uttered only by the priests when pronouncing the priestly blessing and by the high priest during Yom Kippur worship. Out of deference, it was no longer pronounced after the destruction of the Temple; instead, *Adonai* was said.

⁸⁴ See *Guide*, I, 51, 53, 55, 57, 60, etc. Cf. José Faur, "The Character of Apophatic Knowledge in Maimonides' *Guide*," in Dan Cohn-Sherbok, ed., *Theodicy* (Lewiston, 1997), pp. 67-74.

God is "a necessary Being."⁸⁵ This means—as R. Manasseh ben Israel (1604-1657) explained—"His inherent, absolute and unconditional existence."⁸⁶ God's necessary Being stands in syntagmatic opposition to everything else, which is only "a possible being."⁸⁷ It is worthy of note, that according to Maimonides, the literal meaning of the Tetragrammaton is, He who "necessarily exists."⁸⁸ Moses' first mission was to transmit this fundamental doctrine to the elders of Israel, under the title "I am that what I am" (Exod. 3:14). The task of the mission was elucidated by R. Manasseh ben Israel:

Shew them [to the elders of Israel] . . . that my Being is within myself, independent of every other, different from all other Beings, who are so alone by virtue [of] my distributing it [existence] to them, and might not have *been* nor could actually *be* such without it.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ *Guide*, I, 57, p. 90 (ll. 6-7); cf. *ibid.*, 58, p. 92 (l. 6); 63, p. 106 (ll. 20-24). For a definition of "God" as "a necessary Being," see *Mishne Torah, Yesode ha-Torah*, I:1-4; *Perush ha-Mishnayot, Sanhedrin*, X, 1, Foundation I, vol. 4, pp. 210-211; and José Faur, *Homo Mysticus: A Guide to Maimonides' Guide for the Perplexed* (Syracuse, 1998), p. 101. In Jewish tradition (in opposition to Aristotle, see below and n. 87) it has a double connotation: he is absolutely self-sufficient, depending on himself alone and on nothing else, while everything else depends on him alone. This doctrine is implicit in Se'adya's rendition of *Shaddai* (Gen. 17:1; Exod. 6:3) as *at-ta'iq al-kafi*, "the Absolute, the Self-sufficient;" cf. *Guide* I, 63, p. 107 (ll. 6-9); *Perush ha-Mishnayot*, vol. 4, pp. 211-212; on the term *at-ta'iq*, see *ibid.*, p. 211. Elie Benamozegh, *Em la-Migra* (Leghorn, 1862), vol. 3, 18b-19b, proposed that this concept is explicit in Aquilas's translation cited in *Bereshit Rabba* [XLVI, 1. Teodor-Albeck, ed. (Jerusalem, 1965), vol. 1, p. 461]. In support of this thesis, he cited Natan b. R. Yehiel, *'Arukh*, s.v. *iqum*, where he reports that this term was employed by Byzantine Jews to translate *Shaddai*. Benjamin Musafia, *ad loc.*, interpreted that Greek term to mean "self-sufficient." On philological grounds, the editor, Alexander Kohut, *'Arukh ha-Shalem* (New York, 1878), vol. 1, p. 255, rejected Musafia's interpretation. The value of Musafia's contribution rests, however, on his keen knowledge of the *koiné* or regional, colloquial *spoken* Greek, rather than on classical texts and dictionaries. This specialized knowledge is particularly valuable in our case, since the *'Arukh* emphasized that it was *used* in the *oral* translation of the Torah. To sum up, the idea of God as a "necessary Being" is a primary Jewish concept, already known to Greek speaking Jews. From them it passed somehow to the Arabic of Se'adya, finally acquiring doctrinal formulation in Maimonides' writings. On the Aristotelian notion of "necessary existence," see Faur, *Homo Mysticus*, pp. 101; 223 n. 59.

⁸⁶ *The Conciliator*, vol. 1, p. 104.

⁸⁷ See *Guide*, I, 57, p. 90 (ll. 4-9); II, Introduction, Axioms 19, 20; chap. I, p. 172 (ll. 14-25); and R. Joseph b. Jehuda, *Zwei Abhandlungen*, ed. Moritz Lowy (Berlin, 1879). Cf. Harry Wollson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA, 1934), vol. 1, p. 67; and *Homo Mysticus*, pp. 98-102.

⁸⁸ *Guide*, I, 61, p. 101 (l. 10). Expressing in a single word the three tenses of the verb "to be" in Hebrew; thus, signifying, continuous, uninterrupted beingness, from ever until ever.

⁸⁹ *The Conciliator*, vol. 1, p. 103.

In Scripture, God is occasionally called *Adon* "Lord," "Master," in the specific sense of possessing "Dominion"—as in "Lord (*Adon*) of the whole earth" (Josh. 3:11, 13; Zech. 4:14, 6:5; Ps. 97:5). From this substantive derives *Adonai*, regularly used in Hebrew as an appellative to "God." In Scripture, God's dominion is related to the root *QaNaH*, which means not only "ownership," "possession," but also "forging," "making," as when Eve said on the birth of Cain, "*qaniti* a person with God" (Gen. 4:2), i.e., "I have forged a person together with God."⁹⁰ Bearing this sense in mind, the oath pronounced by Abraham to Melchizedek, "I have raised my hand [in oath] to the Supreme God, *qone* heavens and earth" (Gen. 14:19, 22), acquires precision and depth. God is acknowledged *qone* in the double connotation of Creator/Lord of the universe.⁹¹ It means that God, the Creator, has Supreme Dominion over all by Right of Creation. This doctrine is ripe with implications, both theological and political.

The association Dominion/Creation is explicit in Maimonides. When discussing the title *Adonai* used by the Hebrews for reading the Tetragrammaton, Maimonides explained that it derives from the root *Adon*. The final diphthong *ai* (rather than the suffix *i* as in *Adoni*) indicates the grammatical absolute construct noun. Accordingly, *Adonai* stands for total "Dominion," without condition or encumbrance.⁹² More cogent for our present purpose is the fact that "Dominion" is a function of *qana* in a double sense: Creator and thus Lord (*Dominus*) with absolute Dominion (Gen. 14:19, 22).⁹³ Here is what Maimonides says:

Concerning Him it was said to have possession (*qana*) (Gen. 14:19, 22) over them [Heaven and earth], because He, the most High, has dominion over them [His creatures] as a Master has dominion over his

⁹⁰ See Umberto Cassuto, *From Adam To Noah* (Jerusalem, 1953), pp. 133-135 (Heb.) and Deut. 32:5. Cf. Prov. 8: 22, and Se'adya Ga'on, *Mishle*, ed. and trans. Joseph Qafih (Jerusalem, 1976), p. 77. The enigmatic aphorism exhorting that one should "*qane* a friend" (M. Abot 1:5) means "to forge" a friend through amity and comradeship, rather than hope to find one "ready-made." Incidentally, the above mentioned verse means that Eve, the first mother of humanity, recognized that parents have only *limited* dominion over their children, subservient to God's, see B. Yeb. 5b; *Mishne Torah*, *Mamrim* 6:12; unlike pagan society where parents' dominion over children is absolute, cf. Below, n. 131.

⁹¹ See *Guide* II, 30, p. 251 (ll. 22-25).

⁹² *Guide*, I, 61, p. 100 (ll. 20-29). Cf. Judah ha-Levi, *Kuzari*, IV, 3, Arabic original, eds. David H. Baneth and H. Ben-Shammai (Jerusalem, 1977), p. 153 (l. 5): *ya mawlai*, "O my Lord," in the sense of "supreme sovereign" or "governor," "master;" the Hebrew translation, p. 159 (ll. 1-2) misses the point. This is the root used by Maimonides in connection to *qana*; see the quotation below, n. 94.

⁹³ See *Guide* II, 30, p. 251 (ll. 22-25).

slaves. This is why He is called "Lord (*Adon*) of all the earth" and "the Lord" (*ha-Adon*), since one cannot be a Master unless having possession (*qinyan*).⁹⁴

Intimately bound up with the idea of God's absolute Dominion is that "Creation" must be essentially and fundamentally *ex nihilo*. This is why, explained Maimonides, Scripture stipulates that God "*bara* ('created') the whole world, because according to us, it was created out of nothing."⁹⁵ To ascertain this overwhelming principle, Jews proclaim in the *Amida* thrice daily, that God is *Qone ha-kol*, "Creator/Having Dominion over Everything." In this respect, God's Dominion is positively different than that of earthly monarchs. The latter's claim for Dominion is based on violence and the might of the sword. God's Dominion alone is categorical and absolute, since is based on the right of Creation. Concerning this focal principle, Abendana wrote: "Whereas God Almighty is the Lord and Governor of the Universe, as having by Right of Creation the Supreme Dominion over all Creatures."⁹⁶ It would be helpful to consider at this point that the Septuagint renders *Adonai* by the Greek legal term *Kyrios*. This, as Professor Bickerman observed, is

[a] legal term meaning the legitimate master of someone or something, a word which as a substantive was not used in Greek religious language. It is simply a literal translation of the Hebrew appellation *Adonai* (the Lord), which became in the meantime the standard pronunciation of the awe-inspiring Tetragrammaton.⁹⁷

The doctrine represented by the Tetragrammaton standing for God as a necessary Being and the doctrine of God as having absolute Dominion, represented by *Adonai*, are interrelated. The point of the Hebrew Scripture is not merely that God "exists" (as a metaphysical postulate) but that he has absolute Dominion over all Creation. Put differently, only a necessary Being can have absolute Dominion. (Polytheism is the intellectual alternative to the above).⁹⁸ Thus, Maimonides opened the *Mishne Torah* with the formulation of these two doctrines (*Yesode ha-Torah* 1:1-5). The first paragraph postulates that God alone exists from eternity and everything depends on him. This postulate

⁹⁴ *Guide* II, 30, p. 252 (ll. 6-8). Judah ha-Levi, mentioned above n. 92, refers to the same verse.

⁹⁵ *Guide* II, 30, p. 252 (ll. 4-5).

⁹⁶ *Discourses*, p. 126.

⁹⁷ Elias Bickerman, *From Ezra to the Last of the Maccabees* (New York, 1962), p. 66.

⁹⁸ Cf. Faur, *Homo Mysticus*, pp. 139-142 and p. 235, n. 89.

constitutes, "The Foundation of Foundations and the Pillar of the Sciences" (1:1). It means that everything depends on him (1:2), but he does not depend on anything else (1:3). Since everything else exists conditionally, Scripture established that he alone exists *truly*: nothing else could partake of *his* level of existence (1:4). These paragraphs are followed by a paragraph stipulating God's absolute Dominion. Paraphrasing the biblical formula (Josh. 3:11, 13; Zech. 4:14, 6:5; Ps. 97:5) quoted above, Maimonides wrote: "That [necessary] Being is the God of the Universe, Ruler of the whole World" (1:5).⁹⁹

Before proceeding I must dispose of a common misconception. Popular wisdom notwithstanding, for Maimonides the first precept (*misva*) of Judaism is not belief in the "existence" of God. As argued by R. Hasdai Crescas (d. ca. 1412), conceptually a *misva* (precept) presupposes a *mesave* or "authority" issuing the *misva*.¹⁰⁰ In our case, this would lead to the absurdity which, subsequent to believing in the existence of the Supreme Authority God (issuing the *misva*), we are prescribed to believe that he *exists*! Rather, as per the Arabic original of Maimonides' *Sefer ha-Misvot*, the precept consists in "acknowledging [God's] *ar-rabbubiyya*."¹⁰¹ Like many such terms, this, too, entered the Arabic religious lexicon via Judeo-Aramaic; in our case the Aramaic *rab* translating the Hebrew *Adon*. Accordingly, the first *misva* consists in "acknowledging God's Dominion."¹⁰² For that reason, immediately after formulating the doctrine that God is ruler of the whole world (1:5), Maimonides continues: "And acknowledge-

⁹⁹ Maimonides chose the expression "Ruler of the whole Earth" out of stylistic considerations; see the anonymous *Perush* ad loc. printed in the standard editions. It refers to the "inhabitants of the earth," and it parallels the liturgical formula "King of the Universe."

¹⁰⁰ This point was raised by Hasdai Crescas, *Or ha-Shem* (Offset Edition, Tel-Aviv, 1963), 3a. R. Crescas did not have the foggiest idea what Maimonides was talking about. In several of my writings I point out that with the triumph of the anti-Maimonidean ideology, Jewish thinkers were closer to Christian theologians than to the rabbis or Scripture.

¹⁰¹ Maimonides, Arabic text of *Sefer ha-Misvot*, Joseph Qafih, ed. (Jerusalem, 1971), positive precept # 1, p. 58. This term appears once at the beginning of the paragraph, "acknowledging [God's] *ar-rabbubiyya*," and once at the end, concluding that indeed the first commandment consists in "acknowledging [God's] *ar-rabbubiyya*;" see textual variants, n. 6. (Qafih's translation is faulty). It appears also in *ibid.*, Principle IX, p. 32, see below, n. 107. For a further analysis, see José Faur, *Studies in the Mishne Torah* (Jerusalem, 1978) (Heb.), pp. 159-160; and *idem*, "Intuitive Knowledge of God in Medieval Jewish Theology," in *Jewish Quarterly Review* 67 (1976-1977), pp. 90-110. Cf. below, n. 104.

¹⁰² My friend, the late Professor E.Y. Kutscher, *Words and Their History* (Jerusalem, 1961), p. 31, dismissed the popular association of the Latin *Dominus* with the Hebrew *Adon*. He is only partially correct. For the Romans, *dominus* was semantically and

ment of this [Hebrew demonstrative pronoun, singular: *ze*] matter is a positive precept" (1:6). It may be of some interest to note that in the course of explaining Gen. 28:20, Maimonides' son, R. Abraham (1186-1237) reports in the name of his father: "Far be it from the faithful—even if he would be the lowliest of the children of Jacob—to accept God's Dominion (*rabbubiyatihi*) only conditionally."¹⁰³

Concerning the biblical basis for the first precept, Maimonides cites "I am God *elohekha*" from the First Commandment (Exod. 20:2). This point deserves to be explained. Rather than simply assuming that *elohekha* is a tautology, as is often done, and translating it "your God" (accordingly, the first message transmitted by God to Israel is a redundancy: "I am God your God"), in Judeo-Arabic tradition this term is translated *rabbak* "your Master," i.e., someone with *av-rabbubiyā* over you.¹⁰⁴ Bearing this in mind, Maimonides' sense is clear: the First Commandment does not come to establish "I am God," but, rather, "I am God *elohekha*," that is, *rabbak*, "with Dominion over you."¹⁰⁵ God's Dominion is absolute and indivisible.¹⁰⁶ Accordingly, the

linguistically linked to *domus*, "house, domicile;" see Émile Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and Society* (Coral Gables, 1969), p. 245. The semantic field of *Dominus*, particularly as it appears in Christian texts and ecclesiastical Latin (but not exclusively), is not Roman but the Jewish *Ribbon/Adon*. In the form *rab* it stands in Talmudic literature for the title "scholar, master," having authority to transmit and render legal decisions (hence the modern "rabbi"). It may be of some interest to Latinists to note that under the influence of the Jewish *rab*, *dominus* was used in Medieval Latin in the sense of "legal expert;" see the texts cited in Herman Kantorowicz and Beryl Smalley, "An English Theologian's View of Roman Law," in *Medieval and Renaissance Studies* (1941), pp. 241, 247.

¹⁰³ Perush R. Abraham, R.S. Sason, ed. (London, 1958), p. 88 (Heb.).

¹⁰⁴ It is important to recall that *eloah* with or without a suffix, e.g., *elohekha*, *eloheanu*, is not a mere synonym but one out of the seven appellatives of the God of Israel; see *Mishne Torah*, *Yesode ha-Torah* 6:1-3, i.e., with a specific and singular connotation. Invariably, when it relates to the God of Israel, Se'adya translates it *rabbak*, see, for example, his translation of Exod. 15:26; 20:2, 6, 9, 11, etc. Lev. 2:13; 18:21; 19:12; 21:3, etc. However, when the verse refers to a pagan deity, he translates it *ma'budak*, "your [object of] worship;" see Gen. 31:32.

¹⁰⁵ The same idea is found in ibn Ezra, *Yesod Mova*, Joseph Cohen and Uriel Simon, eds. (Ramat-Gan, 2002), VII, 10, p. 142 (ll. 106-107), who wrote that the first precept is for the individual to accept God as *eloah*; cf. editors' note, ad loc. The source of this definition is Rabbinic. In Y. Ber. 1:10, 3c, the expression "I am God, *elohekha*" in the First commandment is equated with *eloheanu* at the beginning of the *Shema*, the purpose of which, according to the M. Ber. 2:2, is "acknowledging the Kingdom," i.e., Dominion, "of Heaven." This passage appears in *Hilkhot ha-Yerushalmi le-ha-Rambam*, Saul Lieberman, ed. (New York, 1947), p. 21. Lieberman was unaware of the precise connotation of these terms; see his note ad loc., and therefore could not come to grips with the meaning of the above or the reason why Maimonides needed to include it in his compendium of the *Yerushalmi*.

¹⁰⁶ And not shared with any creature, cf. David Qamhi, on Is. 42:8.

Second Commandment does not come to prohibit polytheism but, as per Se'adya's translation, to attribute God's *rabbubiyya* to someone else.¹⁰⁷ The apostasy of the golden calf was not because these people believed in another God; they apostatize, rather, because by declaring "This is *elohekha*, O Israel!" (Exod. 32:4, 8)—Se'adya's translation: "this is *rabbak* O Israel!"—they attributed dominion to something other than God.¹⁰⁸ It would be opportune to point out here that the *Shema'* is not merely an affirmation that there is only one God, but, rather, that "God *elohenu* is One God" (Deut. 6:4). In Se'adya's translation: "Hear O Israel, that God *rabbana*—having Dominion over us—is one God," i.e., no one else can claim Dominion but him.¹⁰⁹

A semantically cognate term, but not identical to *Adon* and *Ribbon*, is the Rabbinic *manhig*. It has several meanings. As a verb, its primary sense is "to conduce," "to move or keep in motion," a beast (as in M. B.M. 1:2, etc.). It also means to "manage," "to guide," as with the pillar of fire guiding and protecting Israel in the desert (T. Sot. 11:1), and a parent guiding and protecting his child (Y. Qid. I, 7, 61a, etc.). As a substantive, *manhig* stands for "governor," "political leader."¹¹⁰ Occasionally, the rabbis apply this term to God, in the quality of *manhig* of the world.¹¹¹ In these two senses Maimonides applies the title *Manhig* to God. First, God conduces and gives motion

¹⁰⁷ See Se'adya's translation of Exod. 32:4, 8. Cf. *Sefer ha-Misvat*, Arabic text, p. 181; similarly, *ibid.*, Principle IX, p. 32; Maimonides illustrates an "intellectual sun" as if one were to attribute *rabbubiyya* to someone besides God (Qafih's translation in both places is faulty). Likewise, in his son's commentary, *Perush R. Abraham*, p. 315, the Second Commandment comes to prohibit attributing God's *rabbubiyya* to someone else. The source of this interpretation is Rabbinic. According to the M. San. 7:4, "acknowledging" (*ha-meqabbel*) an idol or a deity as *eloah* constitutes "*'aboda zara*," even if no ritual was performed; see B. San. 61a, *Mishne Torah*, *Aboda Zara* 3:4; and José Faur, "Performative and Descriptive Utterances in Jewish Law," in Arye Edrei, ed., *Studies in Jewish Law in Honor of Professor Aaron Kirschenbaum* (*Dine Israel* 20-21, 5760-5761), pp. 101-121, especially pp. 108-110 (Heb.).

¹⁰⁸ According to Judah ha-Levi, *Kuzari*, I, 97, pp. 33-36, Arabic original, pp. 29-32, the children of Israel neither worshipped the golden calf nor "negated [God's total] *rabbubiyya*;" Arabic original p. 30 (l. 18); cf. *ibid.*, p. 29 (l. 18), and IV, 15, p. 168 (l. 9); the Hebrew, p. 34 (l. 24) is faulty, but *ibid.*, p. 33 (l. 24), and IV, 15, p. 174 (l. 5) correctly translated: *ribbonuto*.

¹⁰⁹ This is consistent with the rabbis' interpretation of the *Shema'* mentioned above, n. 105.

¹¹⁰ *Debarim Rabba* (Lieberman), *Shofetim* IX, pp. 88-89; *Bemidbar Rabba* XX, 4 (Vilna edition), 83d; *ibid.* XXI, 2, 89d; *Debarim Rabba* V, 8 (Vilna edition), 110c.

¹¹¹ See *Bereshit Rabba* XXXIX, 1, vol. 1, p. 365; *Debarim Rabba* (Vilna edition) IX, 9, 117c. Thus, the common Judeo-Arabic expression *Alla yudabbet*, "God shall lead," indicating that God, as Supreme leader, will take charge.

to the cosmic sphere, *not* as the mechanical prime mover, but as a supreme political leader in charge of all his subjects (Arabic: *mudabbir*, Hebrew: *manhig*).¹¹² To dispel any suggestion of some point of contiguity (either ontological or spatial) between God, *Manhig*, and the Universe, Maimonides compares God's ruling of Creation to a skipper, but not exactly:

The relation of God to the Universe is the relation of a skipper to his boat. This, however, is not an exact comparison or true simile. Rather, we only intended to indicate that God guides (Arabic: *mudabbir*, Tibbon: *manhig*) whatever exists. It intends to imply that He awards to it [His creations] contiguity [both spatial and time] and preserves their proper order.¹¹³

This fundamental doctrine was incorporated in the *Mishne Torah* (*Yetsode ha-Torah* 1:5): "The God of the Universe and *Adon* of the whole earth is *Manhig* the (cosmic) sphere with a boundless and uninterrupted might."¹¹⁴ Patriarch Abraham, in Hebrew intellectual tradition, is not the first monotheist, but the first to have discovered that the One and Only God actually is the "*Manhig* moving the (cosmic) sphere."¹¹⁵ The source is Rabbinic. The rabbis report that given the lack of

¹¹² Cf. *Teshuva* 3:2. Consistently, Samuel ibn Tibbon identifies the Arabic *mudabbir*, "political leader," in the *Guide* with the Hebrew *manhig*; see *Guide* I, 58, p. 93 (l. 22), etc. As with many other technical terms, the Arabic *mudabbir* come from the Judeo-Aramaic, in our case *debar*, "to guide;" see, for example *Targum* on Gen. 2:15, 11:11, 20:14, 31:14, etc. This applies even when an angel, Exod. 14:19, 21, or God, Deut. 20:4, is guiding. As a substantive, *dabbar* means "political leader," see B. San. 8a. (In both cases, as a verb or substantive, the root DBR is connected with the Hebrew DBR, "speech," "word." This is the place to point out that the Hebrew *manhig* indicates, not only someone who guides directly without an intermediate agent or cause, but also someone assuming responsibility and supervising what is taking place; see, for example, *Debarim Rabba* IX, 9 (Vilna edition), 117c. God exercises his guidance and providence variously by means of angels and other agents while still remaining absolute Lord and *Adon*; see *Guide*, II, 6. Indeed, "you will not find at all an action executed by God except through an angel," *ibid.*, p. 182 (l. 14); see *The Conciliator*, vol. 1, pp. 260-261. Cf. *Guide* II, 10, p. 186 (l. 29) ff., and below, n. 114.

¹¹³ *Guide* I, 58, p. 93 (ll. 20-23).

¹¹⁴ Cf. M. B.M. 1:2, B. B.M. 8b-9a, and *Mishne Torah*, *Gezela* 17:5: ownership of a beast goes to the *manhig*, i.e., the person controlling the beast's movements—not to the person mounting or holding it. This is consistent with the first blessing of the evening *Shema'* proclaiming that God *ma'arib 'arabim* by his word, i.e., as a *Manhig*. For the precise connotations of *manhig*, see *Mishne Torah*, *Shabbat* 20:6, *Kil'ayim* 9:7; and Faur, "Performative and Descriptive Utterances in Jewish Law," pp. 112-114. Cf. Below, n. 144.

¹¹⁵ *Mishne Torah*, *Aboda Zara* 1:3 (l. 38, and l. 34); *Guide* II, 19, pp. 216 (ll. 23)-217 (l. 5); II, 13, p. 198 (ll. 28-30); cf. Se'adya and ibn 'Ezra on Deut. 33:26.

homogeneity and uniformity of astral bodies,¹¹⁶ Abraham concluded: "Unless [the celestial bodies] have a *manhig* they could not [move] in this fashion! [Therefore] it would be inappropriate to worship them, rather [we should worship] their *Manhig*!"¹¹⁷ God/*Manhig* is a key, elementary concept. In the intellectual apparatus of Israel there is no cogent difference between an atheist postulating that "there is no God" and another postulating "that the world has no *Manhig*;" both fall into the first class of *minim* (heretics). Noticeably, to the second class of *minim* belong not those ascertaining the existence of more than one deity but those positing "that there is a *Manhig*, but they are two or more."¹¹⁸

The modern emphasis on biblical "monotheism" misses the point.¹¹⁹ Scripture does not come to teach a metaphysical axiom but, rather, that the One and Only necessary Existent, Creator of Heaven and earth and everything else has absolute *Domínion* over his Creation.¹²⁰ It means, that in the quality of absolute Master, he issues *misvot* "precepts"—a series of laws regulating all the aspects of the spiritual and political life of his subjects.¹²¹ To stress this fundamental doctrine, Jewish law requires that a blessing should not only be addressed to "our God," but also should spell out: "King of the Universe."¹²² The holidays of *Rosh ha-Shana* and *Yom Kippur* are to remind us that God in

¹¹⁶ See below, n. 144.

¹¹⁷ *Medrash Hagadol, Genesis*, M. Margulies, ed. (Jerusalem, 1967), pp. 210-211. In a parallel text, *ibid.*, p. 205 (l. 5): *Adon*. As indicated by the editor, a similar passage is found in the Geniza fragments published by Jacob Mann, *The Bible as Read and Preached in the Old Synagogue*, vol. 1 (New York, 1971), Hebrew Section, pp. 59-60. Obviously this bears on the whole concept of divine providence; see *Guide* III, 17, p. 335 (ll. 8-11); 23, especially pp. 360 (l. 10)-361 (l. 6).

¹¹⁸ *Mishne Torah, Teshubá* 3:7. Cf. *Guide* I, 75, p. 94 (ll. 23-29); III, 17, p. 335 (ll. 8-11).

¹¹⁹ Chiefly on *a priori* grounds and intellectual bias, "Biblical monotheism" is analyzed according to Greek, more specifically Hellenistic, ideology, with foreseeable results: If one were to add to it the notion of "ethical"—a term antithetical to *misva* and *halakha*—(neither the rabbi's lexicon nor Scripture have a semantic equivalent to "ethics"), and then go on to examine "Biblical Ethical Monotheism," the conclusions will be confusing, at best. It is as if one were to assume that "apples" in Judaism are "bananas" and then go on to demonstrate that the biblical concept of this fruit is flawed. See, however, the valiant attempt of V. Nikiprowetzky, in "Ethical Monotheism," in *Daedalus* 104 (1975), pp. 69-90.

¹²⁰ Cf. Judah ha-Levi, *Kuzari*, IV, 15, p. 174; Arabic original, David H. Baneth and H. Ben-Shammai, eds. (Jerusalem, 1977), p. 168 (l. 9).

¹²¹ Including the Seven Noahide Precepts for non-Jews; see José Faur, "Sir Isaac Newton," section III, in Görges K. Hasselhoff and Otfried Fraisse, eds., *Moses Maimonides* [1138-1204], forthcoming.

¹²² B. Ber. 40b; Y. Ber. 9:1, 11d; *Mishne Torah, Berakhot* 1:5.

the quality of King, not only has the right to judge "all the inhabitants of the world"¹²³ but also to remiss their sins.¹²⁴ For the purposes of the present discussion, it may not be superfluous to point out that a most common designation for "God" in Rabbinic literature and Jewish liturgy is *Ribbono shel 'Olam*, "Master" or "Ruler of the Universe." As mentioned earlier, *Ribbon* is the Aramaic translation of *Adon*. Correctly understood, the Hebrew hymn *Adon 'Olam*, sung throughout Jewish synagogues, is a most eloquent testimony of Israel's faith in God's Dominion, both universal and personal.¹²⁵ Finally, the eschatological vision of Israel for the universal kingdom of God expresses Israel's hope that eventually the whole of humanity will recognize God as their Supreme King (rather than the king as Supreme God).

Monolatry, the worship of God according to his *misvot*, is the necessary corollary to God's Dominion. The rabbis understood this well. Pointedly, they taught that the purpose of the first portion of the *Shema*⁶—the most important of all Jewish prayers—is not to *declare* his *existence*—but "to acknowledge the authority of the Kingdom of Heaven." Consequently, the purpose of the second portion of the *Shema*⁶ is "to acknowledge the authority of the *misvot*" (M. Ber. 2:2). The "holiness" that the Jew seeks is not something akin to the cosmic sacrality of pagan religions,¹²⁶ but, specifically, *qedushat ha-misvot* "a sacrality that is awarded by God to the faithful for having *fulfilled* his precepts."¹²⁷ To ascertain this principle, upon the performance of a *misva* a "blessing" is pronounced.¹²⁸ It consists of four small segments. An invocation addressed to God ("Blessed are You God"), followed by an announcement that he is "King of the Universe,"

¹²³ See M. R.H. 1:2; B. R.H. 16b; *Mishne Torah*, *Teshuva* 3:1, 4.

¹²⁴ See M. Yoma 8:9 and George Foote Moore, *Judaism*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1966), vol. 3, pp. 150-151.

¹²⁵ There is a beautiful English translation of this hymn with notes in Joseph H. Hertz, *Daily Prayer Book* (New York, 1963), pp. 556-557. Other hymns were modeled after it, the most popular of which is *Ya Ribbon 'Olam* by Israel Najara.

¹²⁶ See Faur, *Homo Mysticus*, p. 3; idem, "Anti-Maimonidean Demons," pp. 46-48. Cf. *Perush R. Abraham*, p. 302.

¹²⁷ See *Mekhilta de-R. Shim'on bar Yohai*, J.N. Epstein and E.Z. Melamed, eds. (Jerusalem, 1955), on Exod. 19:6, p. 139 (ll. 22-24); and *Sifre Bemidbar*, H.S. Horowitz, ed. (Jerusalem, 1966), #115, p. 127 (ll. 7-12). This is what Joseph, B. Shab. 55a meant when he taught that "sanctity" may not be "absorbed" from the sanctity at the Temple but must be acquired dynamically by fulfilling (*qiryemu*) the Torah.

¹²⁸ The original sense of "blessing" (how could a human *bles*s his maker?!) has been lost. For an accurate understanding of the Hebrew "blessing," see José Faur, "Delocutive Expressions in the Hebrew Liturgy," in *Ancient Studies in Memory of Elias Bickerman* (*The Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society*), vol. 16-17 (1984-1985), pp. 41-54.

i.e., the One having total Dominion over everything. The third segment ascertains that (consequently) he had "awarded us sanctity with his precepts," concluding, "and prescribed us . . .," spelling out the specific precept about to be fulfilled. Conversely, biblical "idolatry" is not just worshipping idols, as per popular wisdom, but, as taught by the rabbis: *'aboda zara*, an "alien," non-*misva* "worship," either because the ritual was not actually prescribed (see Lev. 10:1) or because the individuals performing the ritual were not charged with this responsibility (see Num. 16:17-17:5). This type of "worship" is repudiated totally and absolutely as *'aboda zara* and it constitutes a supreme act of defiance to his Dominion camouflaged as religion.¹²⁹

The biblical ideal of God as Supreme King (instead of king as Supreme God) is more political than theological.¹³⁰ We may add that, correspondingly, God alone can claim Dominion over humankind by Right of Creation: *ex nihilo*. Throughout antiquity there were pagan monotheists,¹³¹ some of whom are mentioned in Scripture with deference.¹³² However, not a single pagan thinker is known to have expressed the belief that the One and only God has absolute Dominion over his creatures—and not the local monarch!¹³³ A principal corollary of biblical monotheism is rejection of a ruler with absolute sovereignty.¹³⁴ Hence, the gross antipathy towards the God of Israel, peculiar to dictators, megalomaniacs, and aspiring intellectuals.

¹²⁹ See Faur, *Homo Mysticus*, pp. 10-11.

¹³⁰ *Medrash Haggadol*, Genesis, p. 205 (ll. 15-16): Nimrod tells Abraham: "Don't you know that I am *Adon* of everything there is? That by (my command) the Sun, the Moon, and the stars and constellations move! I created the entire Universe!"

¹³¹ There is an excellent collection of articles on pagan monotheism, edited by Polymnia Athanassiadi and Michael Frede, *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 1999). This is why the concept of "Dominion" in pagan lore is paternal or political, but not divine; see Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chap. 20.

¹³² See *Mishne Torah*, *'Aboda Zara* 1:2 (ll. 30-31); cf. *Perush R. Abraham*, p. 302.

¹³³ Unlike Hananiah, Mishaël, Azariah, and countless Jewish victims who said "No!" to their local Pharaoh. The ideology of anti-Semitism is more political than "religious." For some insights, see José Faur, "On Martyrdom in Jewish Law: Maimonides and Nahmanides," in *Memorial Volume in Honor of Prof. M.S. Feldbloom* (Ramat-Gan, forthcoming), especially section I (Heb.).

¹³⁴ Some Jews in antiquity rejected all types of authority and refused to acknowledge a human as *despotes* (= *dominus*) "master;" see Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* (Loeb Classical Library), XVII, 23, vol. 9, p. 22. (Incidentally, there is no connection between the above sect mentioned by Josephus and the M. Yad. 6:7, in *fine*.) Obviously, this will lead to total anarchy and therefore never became part of the political ideology of Israel, which recognizes sovereignty *under* the Law.

VI

It has been lamented that "little trace of true Christian feeling" is present in the *Principia*.¹³⁵ In what follows we will show that Newton incorporated the Jewish doctrine of God's Dominion in the "General Scholium" to the *Principia*:

[W]e admire him (God) for his perfection; but we reverence and adore him on account of his dominion; for we adore him as his servants; and a god without dominion, providence, and final causes, is nothing else but Fate and Nature. Blind metaphysical necessity, which is certainly the same always and everywhere, could produce no variety of things.¹³⁶

Reading the following paragraph in Latin, one would get the impression that somehow Newton was trying to link the concept of *Dominus* (Dominion) with *Deus* (God)—something that linguistically makes no sense.¹³⁷ It seems, however, that although writing in Latin, Newton, in the footsteps of Maimonides, was connecting *Adon* "Lord" with *Adonai*.¹³⁸ Here is what Newton wrote:

[F]or God [i.e., Hebrew *Adonai*] is a relative word, and has respect to servants; and *Deity* is the dominion of God not over His own body, as those imagine who fancy God to be the soul of the world, but over servants. The supreme God is a Being eternal, infinite, absolutely perfect; but a being, however perfect, without dominion, cannot be said to be Lord God; for we say, my God, your God, the God of *Israel*, the God of Gods, and Lord of Lords; we do not say, my Eternal, your Eternal, the Eternal of *Israel*; but every Lord is not a God. It is the dominion of a spiritual being which constitutes a God; a true, supreme, or imaginary dominion makes a true, supreme, or imaginary God. And from his true dominion it follows that the true God is a living, intelligent, and powerful Being; and, from his other perfections, that he is supreme, or most perfect. He is eternal and infinite, omnipotent and omniscient; that is, his duration reaches from eternity to eternity; his presence from infinity to infinity; he governs all things, and knows all things that are or can be done.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ Giorgio de Santillana, "Newton the Enigma," in his *Reflections on Men and Ideas* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), p. 26.

¹³⁶ *Principia*, trans. by A. Motte and revised by F. Cajori, 2 vols. (Berkeley, 1934), vol. 2, p. 546.

¹³⁷ Naturally, the English translator of *Principia*, p. 544, note at the bottom of the page, assumed that Newton was thinking of the Latin *Deus/Dominium*. Since there is no linguistic relationship between these Latin terms, he suggested that perhaps "the Latin word *Deus* [derives] from the Arabic *du . . .* which signifies *Lord*."

¹³⁸ See above, n. 94.

¹³⁹ *Principia*, pp. 544-545.

According to Maimonides, God's Dominion is inherent to the idea of God as a necessary Being. This doctrine, too, was incorporated in the "General Scholium." All agree, wrote Newton, "that the Supreme God exists necessarily." He then goes on to describe God as "a Being necessarily existing."¹⁴⁰ Given that only God is a necessary Being, nothing could be coeval with him; i.e., "creation" is essentially and fundamentally *ex nihilo*. Maimonides maintained that "causality," "necessity," as well as all the physical laws are the effect, not the source of "creation." Hence, the laws ruling the universe do not apply to God.¹⁴¹ The preceding precludes identifying God as a force imminent in nature, acting as "the soul" of the world.¹⁴² "This Being," wrote Newton, "governs all things, not as the soul of the world, but as Lord over all."¹⁴³

Fundamental to the doctrine of God as a "necessary Being," is the belief that he acts not mechanically but as a *Manhig*, that is, as a willful, free agent. Maimonides pointed to the uneven distribution of celestial matter as well as the dissimilar motions of astral bodies, as an indication of choice and design, rather than necessity.¹⁴⁴ The chain of cause and effect, observed Newton, will eventually lead us "to the very first Cause, which certainly is not mechanical;"¹⁴⁵ the planetary system is "the Effect of choice" exercised by God.¹⁴⁶ Even though God had created a perfectly mechanical universe, he acts as "a voluntary Agent."¹⁴⁷ "[T]he Motions which the Planets now have," wrote Newton to Richard Bentley (1682-1742), "could not spring from any natural Cause alone, but were impressed by an intelligent Agent."¹⁴⁸ Roger Cotes (1682-1716) further developed this theme in the "Preface

¹⁴⁰ *Principia*, trans. by A. Motte and ed. by Florian Cajori (Berkeley, 1962), vol. 2, p. 546.

¹⁴¹ See *Guide*, I, 56; cf. *ibid.*, 35 (82); 63, p. 106 (ll. 10-13). On the designation of God as "First Cause," see *ibid.*, I, 69 and Faur, *Homo Mysticus*, pp. 89-94.

¹⁴² *Guide*, I, 70, p. 118 (ll. 22-26); III, 29, p. 375 (ll. 22-25). On this fundamental concept, see Philo, *The Special Laws*, I, 18 (Loeb Classical Library), vol. 7, p. 109.

¹⁴³ *Principia*, p. 544; cf. Isaac Newton, *Opticks* (New York, 1952, based on the Fourth Edition, London, 1730), *Qu.* 31, p. 403.

¹⁴⁴ See *Guide* II, 19. Cf. above n. 116. This doctrine is the theme of the first blessing of the Evening *Shema*; cf. above n. 114.

¹⁴⁵ *Opticks*, *Qu.* 28, p. 369.

¹⁴⁶ *Opticks*, *Qu.* 31, p. 402. Cf. *Guide* II, 20, pp. 218 (l. 23)-219 (l. 2), and Faur, *Homo Mysticus*, pp. 112-115.

¹⁴⁷ "Letters to Bentley," I, reproduced in I. Bernard Cohen, ed., *Isaac Newton's Papers & Letters On Natural Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), p. 282.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 284.

to the Second Edition" of the *Principia* (1713) and attacked those who deny that the world "was caused by the will of God," attributing it to "some necessity." There is "not the least shadow of necessity" compelling the Creator. "Without all doubt this world," he declared, "could arise from nothing but the perfectly clear free will of God directing and presiding over all." Maimonides discerned in the anatomical and physiological arrangements, evidence of God's exquisite care and providence.¹⁴⁹ God's wisdom and management exhibited "in an ant or a bee," remarked R. Judah ha-Levi (ca. 1071-1141), "is no less wondrous and subtle than his wisdom and management of the sun and its sphere."¹⁵⁰ In the same vein, Newton wrote:

Can it be by accident that all birds, beasts, and men have their right side and left side alike shaped (except in their bowels); and just two eyes, and no more, on either side of the face; and just two ears on either side [of] the head; and a nose with two holes; and either two forelegs or two wings or two arms on the shoulders, and two legs on the hips, and no more? Whence arise this uniformity in all their outward shapes but from the counsel and contrivance of an Author?¹⁵¹

Maimonides saw in the biological designs, particularly the eye, evidence of God's Providence and Guidance. On the basis of *Psalms* 94, he argued:

... If [God] would be impervious to the theory of sight, how did these instruments which are essential for sight come about? Could one envision that by mere chance it came to pass that a transparent humor was produced, and beneath it another humor similar to it, and beneath it a certain membrane which by mere chance contains a perforation, and that underneath that membrane came about a transparent membrane which [by pure chance] is solid? By way of conclusion: could an intelligent person envisage, that the humors (making up) the eye, the membranes and nervous [system] that as it is well known, are so ingeniously planned—all of which designed to meet a single function [sight]—came about by mere chance? No! But, (then he would pro-

¹⁴⁹ *Guide*, III, 12, p. 322 (l. 28) ff.

¹⁵⁰ *Kuzari* III, 17, ed. and trans. By Y. Eyn Shmuel (Tel-Aviv, 1994), p. 112; cf. *ibid.*, I, 68, p. 21; IV, 25, p. 184; and V, 20 (iii), p. 228; see *Guide* II, 6, p. 183 (ll. 11-25). The *Kuzari* was translated into Latin by Johannes Buxtorf and published in 1660.

¹⁵¹ *Memoirs of the Life, Writings, and Discoveries of Sir Isaac Newton*, vol. 2, pp. 347-348; cf. McLachlan, *Sir Isaac Newton: Theological Manuscripts*, pp. 48-49; cf. *Opticks*, Qu. 31, pp. 369-370.

pose) necessarily that it is a design of nature, as put forward by every physician and philosopher!¹⁵² [But] don't all philosophers agree that nature has neither intelligence nor direction?¹⁵³

A similar view was echoed by Newton:

Whence is it that the eyes of all sorts of living creatures are transparent to the very bottom and only transparent skin and within transparent humors, with a crystalline lens in the middle and a pupil before the lens, all of them so finely shaped and fitted for vision that no artist can mend them? Did blind chance know that there was light and what was its refraction, and fit the eyes of all creatures after the most curious manner to make use of it? These and such like considerations always have and will prevail with mankind to believe that there is a Being who made all things and has all things in his power.¹⁵⁴

Given that God's existence is utterly different from anything else, Maimonides rejected all manners of anthropocentric theology.¹⁵⁵ Consequently, every form of anthropomorphisms and positive attributes are wrong and illegitimate.¹⁵⁶ The same with Newton:

¹⁵² This is precisely what ancient pagans and atheists argued; see above, nn. 142-143. The modern anti-creationist theory is just a rebash of the old pagan belief in a certain organizing force *inherent* to nature, which organizes and directs. Conceptually, their most important contribution is that instead of referring to it as "spirit" or "soul" (terms denounced as heretical), it is now "scientifically" designated "random." This very notion of "nature" was rejected by Nieto in his famous sermon; see Faur, *Golden Doves*, pp. 19-27. See the following note.

¹⁵³ *Guide*, III, 19, p. 346 (ll. 11-22). The Jewish position on this matter was cogently formulated by Elie Benamozegh; see José Faur, "The Hebrew Species Concept and the Origin of Evolution: R. Benamozegh's Response to Darwin," in *Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 63 (1997), pp. 43-66. According to the anti-Creationist dogma, positing total randomness (if it is not "total" it could not be "random"), even if a color TV set were found in some remote astral spot, together with instruction in French and English, it would prove absolutely nothing about extra-terrestrial intelligence, since the design of a TV apparatus is infinitely less complex than the design of a single cell. Upon consideration, assuming their theory of total randomness, the papers and works produce by these luminaries could also be regarded the result of blind chance—there is less probability for the random production of a single petal of a rose than for some of the hodgepodge parading under the cloak of "science;" see Jeremy Campbell, *Grammatical Man* (New York, 1982), p. 16; Faur, *Golden Doves*, pp. 18-27, 59-60. For a full examination of this problem, see Ludwig von Bertalanffy, *General System Theory* (New York, 1968).

¹⁵⁴ *Memoirs of the Life, Writings, and Discoveries of Sir Isaac Newton*, vol. 2, p. 343. Cf. *Opticks*, Q_{ue} 28, pp. 369-370.

¹⁵⁵ See Faur, *Homo Mysticus*, pp. 3-5, 89-90, 121-123.

¹⁵⁶ See *Guide*, I, 51, 53, 55, 57, 60, etc. José Faur, "The Character of Apophatic Knowledge in Maimonides' Guide," in Dan Cohn-Sherbok, ed., *Theodicy* (Lewiston, 1997), pp. 67-74.

Whence also he is all similar, all eye, all ear, all brain, all arm, all power to perceive, to understand, and to act; but in a manner not at all human, in a manner not at all corporeal, in a manner utterly unknown to us. As a blind man has no idea of colors, so have we no idea of the manner by which the all-wise God perceives and understands all things.¹⁵⁷ He is utterly void of all body and bodily figure, and can therefore neither be seen nor heard nor touched; nor ought he to be worshiped under the representation of any corporeal thing. We have ideas of his attributes, but what the real substance of anything is we know not, much less, then, have we any idea of the substance of God.¹⁵⁸

Not only are God's perceptions and actions unlike those of man, but his "knowledge" also is utterly dissimilar to ours. Therefore, Maimonides submitted that God's omniscience and omnipresence are not intrusive to human beings, and we remain free even though God has perfect foreknowledge of our actions.¹⁵⁹ Similarly, Newton remarked: "God suffers nothing from the motion of bodies; bodies find no resistance from the omnipresence of God."¹⁶⁰ Given that God's existence is dissimilar to ours, Maimonides concluded that it is impossible to have direct knowledge of him,¹⁶¹ but only indirectly through his creations.¹⁶² Likewise, Newton wrote that, "We know him only by his most wise and excellent contrivances of things, and final causes."¹⁶³ Although it is impossible to have an immediate knowledge of God, Maimonides maintained that one can draw near him through the understanding of his creations.¹⁶⁴ Similarly, Newton wrote that when he developed the *Principia*, "I had an Eye upon such Principles as might work with considering Men for the Belief of a Deity."¹⁶⁵

¹⁵⁷ On the metaphor of the blind man, cf. Maimonides, *Perush ha-Mishnayot, Sanhedrin*, X, 1, vol. 4, p. 203.

¹⁵⁸ *Principia*, pp. 545-546. Cf. *Mishne Torah, Yesode ha-Torah* 2:10. On God's knowledge, see the quotation from Maimonides, in the following note.

¹⁵⁹ *Mishne Torah, Teshuva* 5:5; cf. *Yesode ha-Torah* 1:9, 2:10, and Faur, *Homo Mysticus*, pp. 93-94. On God's omnipresence, see José Faur, "God as a Writer: Omnipresence and the Art of Dissimulation," in *Religion and Intellectual Life* 6 (1989), pp. 31-43.

¹⁶⁰ *Principia*, p. 545.

¹⁶¹ *Guide* III, 20, p. 348 (ll. 15-29; cf. I, 57-58).

¹⁶² *Guide* I, 34, p. 50 (ll. 8-9; see 71, p. 126 (ll. 25-27); III, 51, p. 456 (l. 5) ff.

¹⁶³ *Principia*, p. 546.

¹⁶⁴ This kind of knowledge, however, does not lead to the ultimate knowledge of God. See *Guide* III, 51, p. 455 (l. 28) ff.

¹⁶⁵ "Letter I to Richard Bentley," in *Isaac Newton's Papers & Letters on Natural Philosophy*, p. 280; cf. *Opticks, Qu.* 31, pp. 405-406. Maimonides (as well as the English *virtuosi*) believed that there are no contradictions between physics and Scripture and that the study of science is indispensable for the proper understanding of the God of Scripture; see *Mishne Torah, Yesode ha-Torah* 2:2; *Guide* I, 46; cf. *ibid.*, 71 (end); III, 28, p. 373 (ll. 16-22).

VII

Basic to linguistic knowledge is the faculty of syntagmatic opposition between the speaking subject ("I") and the addressee ("you").

Dominion, in Hebrew intellectual tradition, is a fundamental dimension of humankind. Adam, so it seems, was the first humanoid to have been created in "the image of God" (Gen. 1:26). Unlike everything else, this creature alone had the singular ability of self-consciousness. Incisively, the Aramaic version associates this faculty with the linguistic apparatus and speech (Gen. 2:7).¹⁶⁶ Fundamental to the linguistic apparatus is the faculty to structurally connect the signifier (sound-image) with the signified (linguistic concept) and thus create a linguistic sign.¹⁶⁷ Interaction of these signs within the linguistic apparatus, permit humankind to communicate and develop linguistic knowledge *without* having genuine comprehension of what they speak about. We can appreciate the rabbis' view (I sense a dash of humor in their words) that, in this respect, human beings are superior to angels, since the latter cannot communicate about matters that they do not comprehend fully. The most important function of the linguistic apparatus is to structure a syntagmatic opposition between the speaking subject ("I") and the addressee ("you"). "I"—the very feeling of subjectivity and self-consciousness—is a linguistic creation established by the syntagmatic opposition "I/you." Without a "you" there is no "I," and vice versa.¹⁶⁸ Adam's self-awareness and consciousness comes in stages. At first, he realizes his own differentiation within the animal kingdom, but is not yet conscious of his subjective "I." His own subjectivity he apprehends at a later stage, when realizing the syntagmatic opposition Adam/Adon.¹⁶⁹

The rabbis reported that before creating Adam, God consulted with the angels:

[God] asked them: "Shall we make Adam?"

They replied to him: "This Adam, what type [of creature] is he?"

God told them: "His wisdom is greater than yours." He then proceeded to parade before them beasts, wild animals, and birds.

He asked them: "This! What is it called?" But they did not know!

¹⁶⁶ See José Faur, "Person and Subjectivity: A Linguistic Category," in *Mentalities* 6 (1990), pp. 15-18.

¹⁶⁷ See Faur, *Golden Doves*, pp. xix, 71.

¹⁶⁸ See *ibid.*, pp. 41-48.

¹⁶⁹ See Faur, *Homo Mysticus*, pp. 4-5.

"This! What is it called?" And they did not know! He then paraded them [the animals] before Adam.

He asked him: "This! What is it called?"

"This is an ox!

"This! What is it called?"

"This is a camel!"

"This! What is it called?"

"This is a donkey!"

"This! What is it called?"

"This is a horse!" . . .

"And you, what is your name?"

He [Adam] answered him [God]: "To me it would be fit to call Adam, since I was created from *Adama* (dust)."

"And what is my name?"

"To you it would be fit to call *Adon* (Master), since you are the Master of all your creations."¹⁷⁰

This means, in simple words, that devoid of consciousness of his syntagmatic relation to Adon, Adam will fall short of forging his own "I" and the "image of God" unique to his distinctive individuation.¹⁷¹

VIII

R. David Nieto came to London in 1701 and served as the head of the Sephardic synagogue *Sha'ar ha-Shamayim* at Bevis Mark until his death in 1728. Newton came to London to take up his appointment as Warden of the Mint in 1696. He moved several times and finally in 1709 he took up residence in a house at St. Martin's street, not too far from Leicester Square, where he lived until 1724. R. Nieto lived in a house next to the synagogue, about a mile from the Mint (at London's Tower). It is highly probable that Newton heard of Nieto, particularly after the rumpus caused by the sermon he delivered on November 20, 1703, negating the notion of "universal Nature"—a position strikingly similar to Newton's.¹⁷² We should bear in mind that Abendana and Nieto must have known each other well.¹⁷³ Not

¹⁷⁰ *Bereshit Rabba* XVII, 4, vol. I, pp. 155-156. Cf. above, n. 90. People who do not recognize God's Dominion believe in human dominion, either their own or others.

¹⁷¹ Cf. Faur, *Homo Mysticus*, pp. 8, 15-16, 127-128, 138-142.

¹⁷² See Faur, *Golden Doves*, pp. 18-22, and above, nn. 142-143.

¹⁷³ Abendana must have worshiped at *Sha'ar ha-Shamayim* where his brother, R. Jacob, served as rabbi (1680-1685). Nieto knew of Abendana; see Kayserling,

only did they belong to the closely knit circle of Spanish and Portuguese Jews, but more importantly they shared a similar educational background and represented the same intellectual tradition of religious humanism and pluralism. It would not be unreasonable to assume that Abendana had mentioned Newton to Nieto, and then Nieto to Newton. I have no proof that Nieto and Newton ever met. But, why shouldn't they? Nieto was the only Jew at the time who had the scientific background to read the *Principia*. Knowing what I know of Nieto's personality and his interest in science and Torah, it would be surprising if he would not have made some effort to meet Newton. I suppose that Newton, too, would have wanted to meet Nieto. In addition to sharing the same passion for Scripture, Rabbinic thought and literature, the calendar, history, religion, and science, Nieto was the only person (besides Abendana) with whom Newton could discuss matters pertaining to his "dreadful secret." At any rate, Nieto relates an event taken place before 1715. It runs as follows:

A man came to me and said: "I know that you are from the children of Israel and believe that there is a God, Creator, who is from Eternity. But I cannot believe that."

I asked him: "Why?"

He replied: "Because I cannot mentally conceive how something can exist without a beginning."

I asked him: "Then, who created the universe?"

He replied: "I do not know!"

I said to him: "There could only be two possibilities. You may either admit that [the universe] is eternal without a beginning or that there is a cause [external to it] that created it, and that cause is from eternity."

He replied: "I think that [the universe] is from eternity."

I replied: "You are contradicting yourself! First you stated that you cannot believe that there is a God, Creator, since it is impossible for you to mentally conceive that there can be something from eternity. Now you are ascertaining that the universe has no beginning!"

For a while he remained speechless. Then he said: "Your question perplexes me. I don't know what to answer."

I said to him: "You are acknowledging [the existence of] something from eternity. Mistakenly, however, you are attributing eternity to the creation, whereas you should have attributed eternity to the Creator. Now, confess and acknowledge that there is an Eternal [Being] and

"Les Correspondants Juifs de Jean Buxtorf," p. 272, n. 2; and of his calendars, see H. Graetz, "Wissenschaftliche," in *Monatsschrift* 9 (1860), pp. 29-34; and the note of A. Berliner, *Magazin* 4 (1877), p. 235.

that that Eternal [Being] is the Creator, in contradistinction to the universe—a creation—which was created.”

Thereupon, he threw himself at my feet, sobbing with great joy. He then kissed me and hugged me and said: “You have bestowed life onto me! For now I know that there is a God, Creator of Heaven and earth, Wise, who Governs and exercises Providence over his creatures, He should bless and multiply you, and increase you in wealth, property, and glory.”¹⁷⁴

Could it be? I don’t know and have no support on the matter. But this does not prevent me from imagining (paraphrasing a more publicized but somehow less intellectually charged occasion), “That this might have well turned out to be the beginning of a wonderful friendship.”

¹⁷⁴ R. David Nieto, *Esh Dat* (London, 1715), II, #134, p. 33b.

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